

Dialogue Focuses on Making College Affordable, Accountable and Accessible

## Spellings Convenes National Summit on Higher Education

On March 23, U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings continued the national dialogue on higher education, which she initiated in 2005 when she created the Secretary's Commission on the Future of Higher Education, by convening leaders and stakeholders from across the country for a summit in Washington, D.C., "A Test of Leadership: Committing to Advance Postsecondary Education for All Americans."

The summit focused on action items based on five key recommendations from the Secretary's commission to improve college access, affordability and accountability. These action items are: 1) aligning K-12 and higher education expectations; 2) increasing need-based aid for access and success; 3) using accreditation to support and emphasize student learning outcomes; 4) serving adults and other



nontraditional students; and 5) enhancing affordability, decreasing costs and promoting productivity.

The commission's findings were the basis for the action plan, announced in a speech by the secretary to the National Press Club in September 2006, to improve America's higher education system and provide students and families with more information and more affordable access to higher education. A key component of that plan was to convene a summit to bring stakeholders and policymakers together to discuss the commission's recommendations, progress, responsibilities and future actions. Another priority was to streamline the process by which students apply for federal student aid using the *Free Application for Federal Student Aid* (FAFSA).

In late March, the secretary announced the

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### Noble Street

## Chicago Charter High School Creates a Culture of Learning to Pave the Road to Higher Education

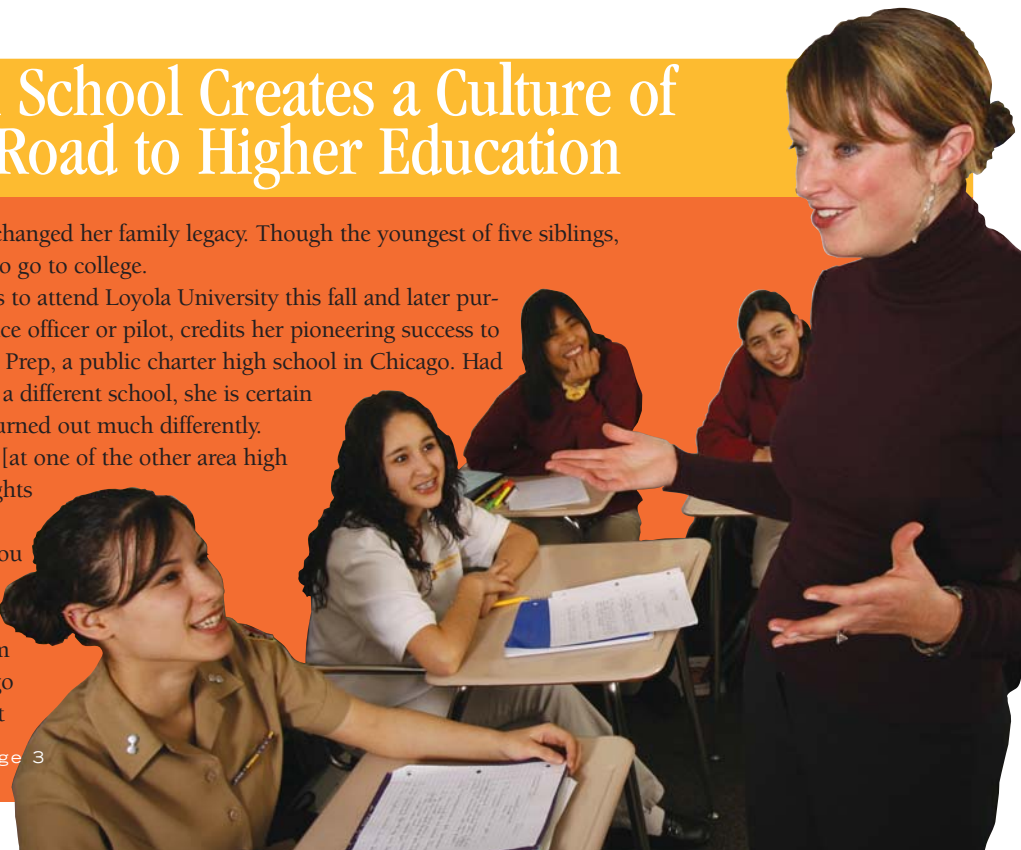
Jasmine Alamo has changed her family legacy. Though the youngest of five siblings, she will be the first to go to college.

Alamo, who plans to attend Loyola University this fall and later pursue a career as a police officer or pilot, credits her pioneering success to Noble Street College Prep, a public charter high school in Chicago. Had she been enrolled in a different school, she is certain things would have turned out much differently.

"I hear every day [at one of the other area high schools] there are fights breaking out," said Alamo. "At Noble, you don't even get dirty looks, let alone physical contact from people. If I were to go somewhere with that

Noble ... teaches you to focus on your goals.

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creation of the FAFSA4caster, an online tool that simplifies the financial aid process for students and families.

Spellings also announced, in the spirit of the commission's call to create a "robust culture of accountability and transparency throughout higher education," the selection of three volun-

teer states—Kentucky, Florida and Minnesota—to participate in a pilot study to provide more easily accessible information about higher education for students and families, particularly for adults returning to school and other underserved populations. The primary outcome of the pilot study will be three new or upgraded

state consumer Web sites that will enable students to compare institutions in the three states.

For more information, visit <http://www.ed.gov> and select "About ED," then "Boards & Commissions."

## Secretary Spellings Addresses Higher Education Summit

**U**.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings led a national summit on higher education, sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education, in Washington, D.C., on March 23. Her remarks follow.

... Strengthening higher education is critical to our future competitiveness. But in my opinion, there's an even stronger moral case to be made. Helping more Americans

First, when it comes to access, the problems begin long before a college application is ever filled out. Despite our best efforts, there are still vast inequities within our K-12 system. With *No Child Left Behind* we've made progress in the early grades ... Reading and math scores are at all-time highs for Hispanic and African-Americans. And, the longstanding achievement gap has finally begun to close.

Unfortunately, in our high schools, it's a much different story. In addition to an epidemic dropout rate, only half of those who graduate are really ready for college-level math and science. ...

A good case study can be seen in the implementation of our new Academic Competitiveness grants. These scholarships are designed to reward Pell [Grant]-eligible students who complete a rigorous high school curriculum, but to date, only half of the total award [amount] has been distributed. ...

On affordability the story is much the same. Skyrocketing tuition increases that have outpaced inflation, family incomes, even health care costs, have also outpaced many Americans' ability to afford and attend col-

lege. Consider that in 1975, the Pell Grant covered 84 percent of costs—today, [it covers] only 36 percent.

... The president is answering the call to make college more affordable. His budget called for the biggest Pell Grant increase in

over 30 years—raising the grant to \$4,600 next year and increasing it to \$5,400 over the next five years. ...

Finally, to better serve all our students, we must inject more transparency into our higher education system. ... Like any other investment or enterprise, we need meaningful data to better manage and improve the system. ... And in almost every area of our government—from prescription drug programs to welfare to K-12 education—we expect accountability for tax dollars.

Yet, when it comes to higher education, we've invested hundreds of billions in taxpayer money and just hoped for the best. Colleges and universities must be more transparent about costs, graduation rates and learning outcomes so that students and parents can make more informed choices. ...

To this end, we're awarding Florida, Minnesota and Kentucky \$100,000 each for consumer information pilots that will make this data more available and useful to families and students. ...

We all have a stake. ... This is urgent work. ... Education is the key to our continued competitiveness and essential to our democracy. ...

For the full March 23, 2007, remarks, visit <http://www.ed.gov> and select "Press Room" and then "Speeches."



Photo by Paul Wood

**NATION'S REPORT CARD**

While high school graduates on average are taking more challenging courses and earning higher grades, 12th-graders failed to produce gains on the 2005 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). On the one hand, as reported in *The Nation's Report Card: America's High School Graduates*, 68 percent completed at least a standard curriculum in 2005, up from 59 percent in 2000, and the overall grade point average was about one-third of a grade higher than in 1990.

On the other hand, however, according to *The Nation's Report Card: 12th-Grade Reading and Mathematics 2005*, the average 12th-grade reading score was the lowest since 1992, albeit not significantly different from the 2002 score. In mathematics, for which a new assessment was used that is not comparable to previous versions, less than one-quarter of high school seniors scored at or above proficient.

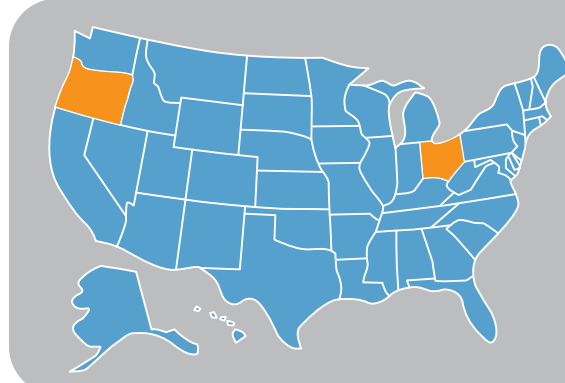
These reports "show that we have our work cut out for us in providing every child in this nation with a quality education," said Secretary Spellings. "The *No Child Left Behind Act* is working to improve our nation's elementary and middle schools, and we must act now to increase rigor in our high schools and improve graduation rates."

To read these two publications, visit <http://nationsreportcard.gov>.

earn a degree is not only important for our economic standing ... it's essential to reinforcing what our country stands for.

If our nation stands for equality, if we believe every child deserves access to the opportunities education provides, then the sad fact that so many of our low-income, minority students are in effect being locked out of higher education doesn't reflect those uniquely American ideals. The very same issues of access, affordability and accountability that make it more difficult for Americans to pursue higher education pose even greater hurdles for our neediest students.

## AROUND THE COUNTRY



**OHIO**—In late February, approximately 13,500 families with school-age children in Dayton were mailed the *My School Chooser* guide profiling 83 of the city's public, private and charter schools. A joint project of GreatSchools.net, the University of Dayton and the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, the guide includes information about the schools' academic

much violence and that much disregard for education, I don't know how I'd survive. If I went there, I wouldn't care as much for my education and my future as I do now."

Creating a culture "where kids behave in respectful ways conducive to learning" was the primary goal when founders Michael Milkie and his wife Tonya started the charter school, he said. Such was not the case, he added, at the high schools where they previously taught for a total of 13 years on the tough south and west sides of Chicago.

"I think many good teachers in many regular schools are doing great work, but their work is compromised by the culture. It doesn't permit most teachers to really be effective,"

said Michael Milkie.

Since opening in August 1999 with the intent to prepare the city's largely low-income, Latino population for higher education, Noble Street College Prep—formerly called Noble Street Charter High School—has recorded an 85-percent graduation rate that exceeds both local (73 percent) and national (71 percent) averages.



More impressively, at least four in five Noble Street graduates progress to college, compared to nine in 20 Chicago Public Schools students. Considering that most students arrive at Noble Street performing below grade level, this is no small feat.

In addition, Noble Street is one of about a dozen high schools in the district that have met the state's adequate yearly progress targets for the past two years, and one of only a few that does not require test scores for admission.

This stellar record of achievement and the promise of a rigorous, world-class education—which includes every student learning Russian as well as trips to Moscow and St. Petersburg made possible with fundraising support by parents and students—have families scrambling to get their children into Noble Street. The wait list unrolls like a scroll, with more than 600 applicants competing for just 150 freshmen slots each year. The only

admissions requirement is that students reside in the Chicago area; the ultimate decision is made by a lottery.

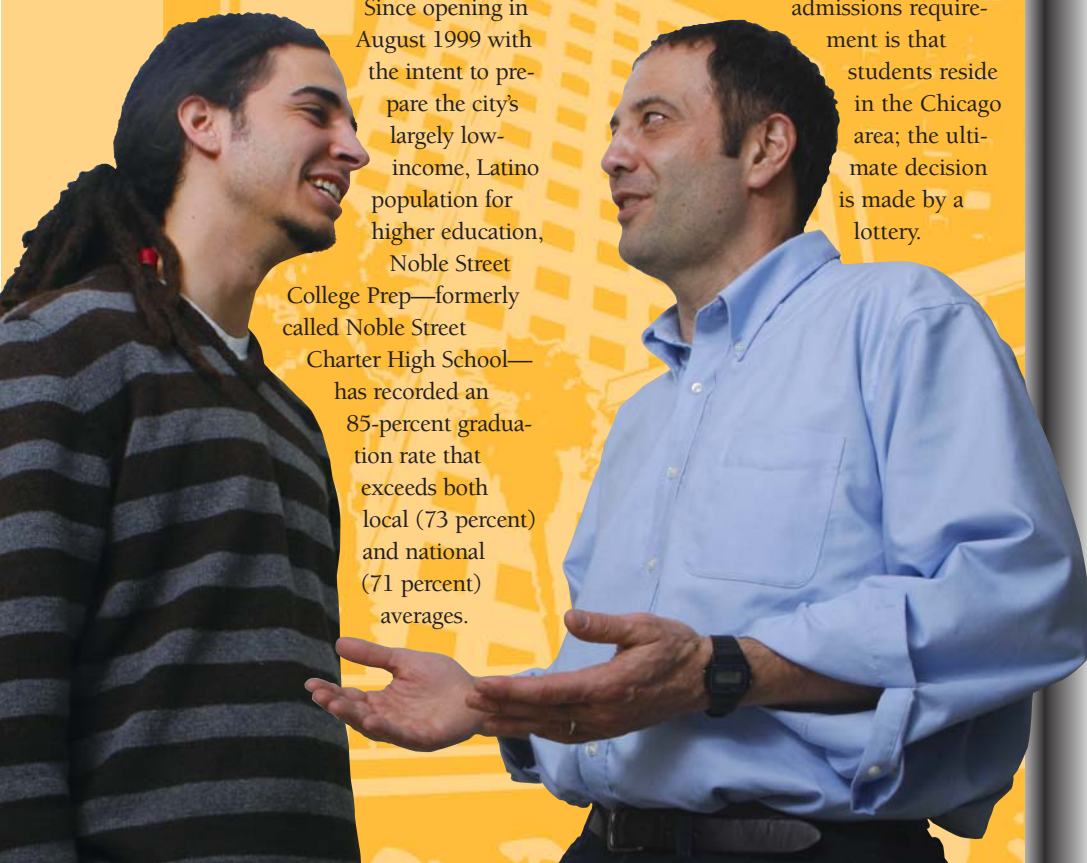
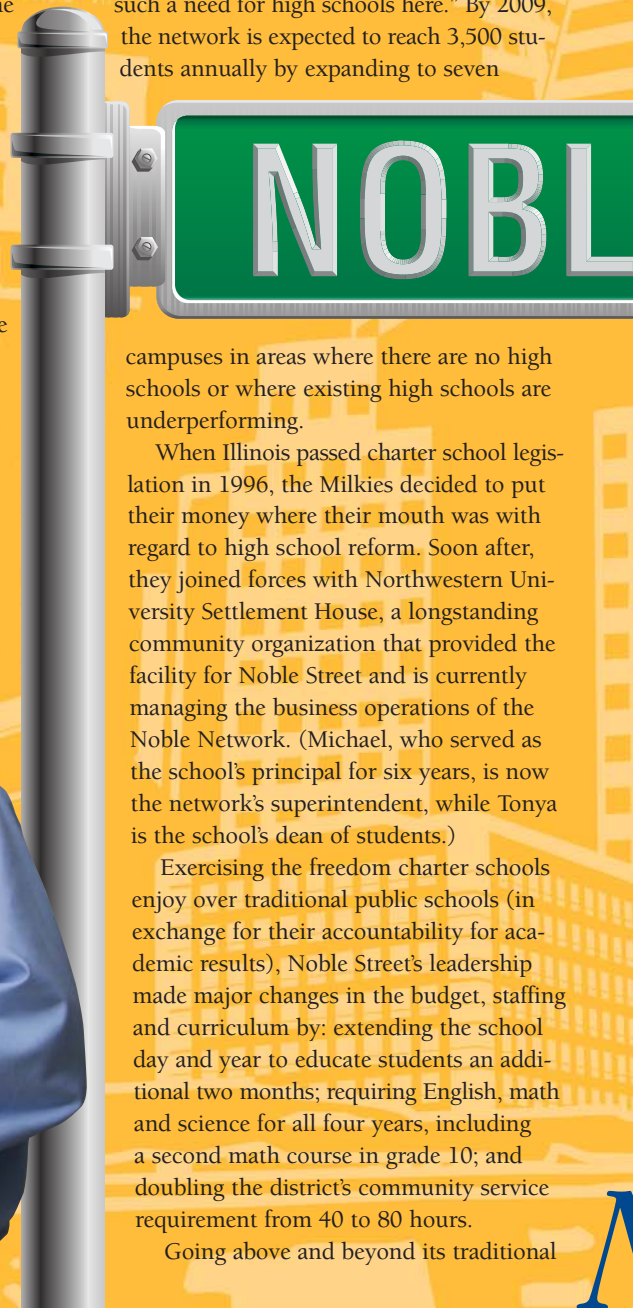
To meet the growing demand, two new nearby campuses opened last year while another two are slated to open this fall. Combined with the 480 students at Noble Street College Prep, this will triple enrollment in the Noble Network of Charter High Schools by next school year. "There were no tears at the lottery night for the first time since 1999," said Noble Street Principal William Olsen. "There's such a need for high schools here." By 2009, the network is expected to reach 3,500 students annually by expanding to seven

campuses in areas where there are no high schools or where existing high schools are underperforming.

When Illinois passed charter school legislation in 1996, the Milkies decided to put their money where their mouth was with regard to high school reform. Soon after, they joined forces with Northwestern University Settlement House, a longstanding community organization that provided the facility for Noble Street and is currently managing the business operations of the Noble Network. (Michael, who served as the school's principal for six years, is now the network's superintendent, while Tonya is the school's dean of students.)

Exercising the freedom charter schools enjoy over traditional public schools (in exchange for their accountability for academic results), Noble Street's leadership made major changes in the budget, staffing and curriculum by: extending the school day and year to educate students an additional two months; requiring English, math and science for all four years, including a second math course in grade 10; and doubling the district's community service requirement from 40 to 80 hours.

Going above and beyond its traditional



philosophies, after-school programs, test scores, and the safety of its facilities. Dayton has an open-enrollment policy that allows children in the city to attend any school in the district. To help families navigate these options, parents are also receiving one-on-one guidance in citywide workshops cosponsored by the Parents Advancing Choice in Education and the Dayton chapter of Black Alliance for Education Options.

**OREGON**—As part of a district-led effort to restructure Central Point's only high school, its school board last month hired four principals to lead four new schools scheduled to open this fall. Designed to be autonomous small high schools on the Crater High School campus, they will serve 400 students each. Funded through a \$1.125 million grant from the Oregon Small Schools Initiative, the reor-

ganization is designed to improve academic achievement and college-going rates through increased accountability and individualized attention to students. The four schools, all college preparatory, are: the Renaissance Academy, an arts and humanities school; the School of Health and Public Services; the School of Business, Innovation and Science; and the School of Natural Resources.

**From left to right:** Superintendent Michael Milkie speaks with teacher Jimmy Redondo; and teacher Tim Brown with his advisee, senior Laurence Pommells. On the cover, teacher Ellen Metz with students Jasmine Alamo, Raquel Martinez, Pearl Perez and Celeste Caicedo. Photos by John Gress.

counterparts, Noble Street also requires students to earn at least two academic enrichment credits outside of the regular school day. Although it is a relatively small school, the offerings are plentiful and have given students a wider platform for greater achievement. For instance, the Rocket Club finished 41st out of 100 teams in a 2005 national competition. And, last spring, the Poetry Slam Team gained recognition in a citywide festival for the poem "... Bomb," an artistic commentary on the fight against terrorism.

Teacher Ellen Metz says the biggest difference between a school like Noble Street and the typical urban high school "is not with the students. I think that's a misconception. Students are students. They want to learn. They crave structure ... support ... consistency. And I feel like Noble provides that for them. To me, the difference is in the way the school is operated."

A key factor in running Noble Street productively has been reducing the class size. Metz—whose largest class is 23 students, a stark contrast to her previous school where 45 students filled one class—says the smaller class size enables teachers to give more individualized attention, which is particularly critical in urban schools where a student's needs can be great.

To make class sizes smaller, funds for employing guidance counselors were redirected toward hiring more teachers.

To retain the counseling services, single-gender advisory classes were created in which a small group of students remain with the same teacher throughout their enrollment. The classes, which serve as the morning homeroom period, provide an opportunity for teachers to track students' progress closely and for students to receive the ongoing support they need.

Tim Brown, who has taught at Noble Street since its inception, says he is still in contact with his first advisory group of students—the school's first graduating class from 2003 who will be completing college this year. Over the years, they have called him for advice on what courses to take, whether they should transfer and other matters. "It's an ongoing process that makes it all worthwhile to me," he said. "Knowing that my efforts have allowed them to get a college education motivates me."

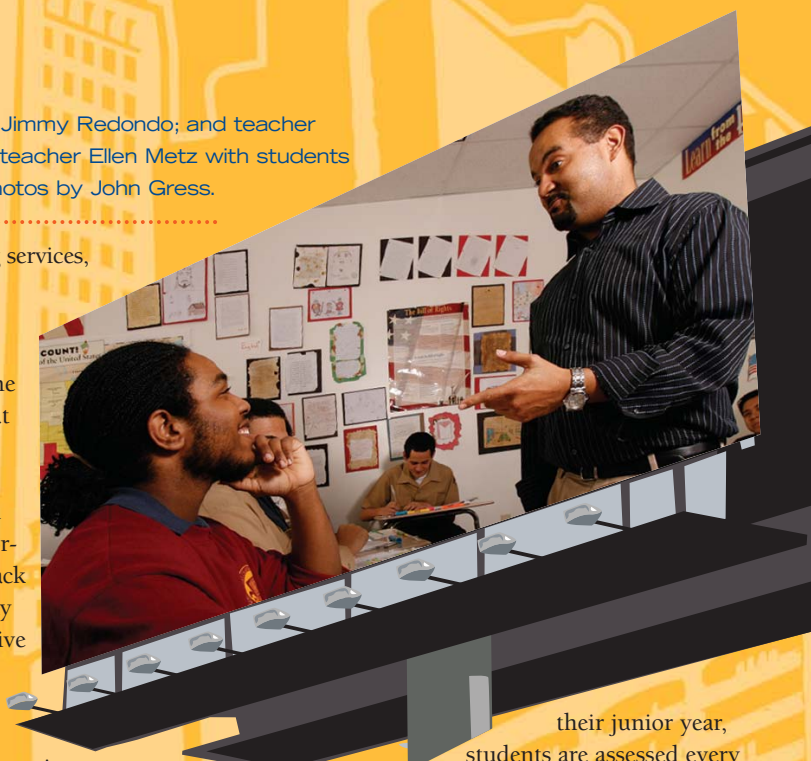
In a practical approach to preparing students for higher education, Noble Street offers a class in the senior year that focuses solely on applying to college. Under a teacher's guidance, students research college prospects and fill out applications for colleges, financial aid and scholarships. For many whose parents have not gone to college, it makes the application process far less daunting, says Michael Milkie. Also, through

their junior year, students are assessed every quarter according to a set of college-level standards that benchmark academic readiness in reading and math.

And, to give students a taste of the college experience, Noble Street partners with the Right Angle Foundation for a summer program that sends sophomores to college campuses across the country. For three to six weeks students take classes for which they earn credit, visit campus facilities and meet informally with college students. Two years ago, senior Laurence Pommells took an accelerated course in management information systems at the University of Arizona. Pommells, who will be attending Pomona College to major in computer engineering and study Russian, Japanese and Korean, says as early as his freshman year he was encouraged to give college a serious look.

"The thing about Noble is that it teaches you to focus on your goals," he said. "It teaches you to stay determined to win the prize."

—BY NICOLE ASHBY



# Noble Street College Prep



- > **Grade Span:** 9–12
- > **Locale:** Urban
- > **Total Students:** 480
- > **Race/Ethnicity Enrollment:** 83% Latino, 12% African-American, 4% white, 1% Asian
- > **Free and Reduced-Price Lunch Eligible:** 85%
- > **English Language Learners:** 4%
- > **Special Education Students:** 14%
- > **Percentage Proficient:** In math, 53%; in reading, 49% (based on 11th-graders assessed on the 2006 state exam).
- > **Interesting Fact:** Although most of its new students enter the school performing below grade level, Noble Street reports an 85-percent graduation rate that exceeds both local (73 percent) and national (71 percent) averages.

**April 5, 12**

**Supplemental Educational Services Regional Workshops**, sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education. This series provides free technical assistance for organizations interested in becoming approved providers of supplemental educational services for disadvantaged students. Locations and dates include: April 5, Little Rock, Ark.; and April 12, Lexington, Ky. Visit <http://www.ed.gov> and select “No Child Left Behind,” then “Choices for Parents” and “Getting Students Help”; or call 1-800-USA-LEARN.

**April 15–21**

**National Volunteer Week**, sponsored by the Points of Light Foundation and the Volunteer Center National Network since 1974. This year, Target Corporation joined the partnership to recognize millions of volunteers who are helping to solve social problems in communities nationwide. Visit <http://www.1-800-VOLUNTEER.org>, or call 1-800-VOLUNTEER.

**April 19–20**

**National Mathematics Advisory Panel Meeting**, the sixth in a series of public hearings sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education. This meeting will be held at the Illinois Math and Science Academy in Aurora. Created a year ago, the panel will advise President Bush and Secretary Spellings on the best use of scientifically based research on teaching and learning math. Visit <http://www.ed.gov> and select “About ED,” then “Boards & Commissions”; or e-mail [NationalMathPanel@ed.gov](mailto:NationalMathPanel@ed.gov).

# Q&A GLOSSARY

*What is the Department doing to help high school students who are struggling to read?*

The U.S. Department of Education is seeking to improve the literacy skills of struggling adolescent readers through a new grant program called Striving Readers. According to the latest Nation's Report Card, the average 12th-grade reading score was the lowest it has been since 1992. A complement to the successful Reading First program for younger students, Striving Readers supports research-based reading interventions for middle and high school students in Title I-eligible schools that are struggling to meet the adequate yearly progress (AYP) requirements under the *No Child Left Behind Act*. The program seeks to raise the overall academic achievement of these students by enhancing the quality of literacy instruction across all subject areas and by building a scientific research base around specific reading strategies that improve adolescent literacy skills.

To be eligible, school districts must have schools serving grades 6–12 with at least 75 percent of their students qualifying for free and reduced-price lunches. The funds must be used for: research-based programs designed to improve basic reading skills, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension; professional development opportunities that are aligned with scientifically based reading research; valid and reliable reading assessments; and the design and implementation of a rigorous program evaluation.

First created in 2005, Striving Readers has supported eight projects across the country, each averaging \$3 million over a five-year period. President Bush is requesting an additional \$100 million in his 2008 budget to continue funding these as well as new projects.

For more information, visit <http://www.ed.gov> and select “Programs,” then “Title” for “Striving Readers”; or call 202-205-6272.

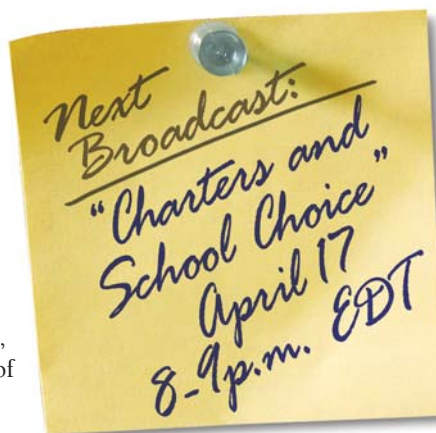
## Striving Readers:

A U.S. Department of Education grant program that supports research-based interventions for middle and high school students reading below grade level.

## News Show Looks at Charters, School Choice

The latest resources and options available to parents under the *No Child Left Behind Act*, including charter schools and school choice, will be the focus of the April edition of *Education News Parents Can Use*, the U.S. Department of Education's monthly television program.

*No Child Left Behind* provides parents with more information about schools than ever before, and it gives them an expanding list of options that work to translate this information into academic success for their children. April's show will spotlight innovative options—such as charter schools, free tutoring programs, public school choice and private school scholarships for students in low-performing schools—and discuss how these options



empower parents to ensure that their children have access to a high-quality education, regardless of race, income or zip code. In addition, the broadcast will feature high-performing charter schools and districtwide school choice programs from across the country that demonstrate how families have benefited from parent options

under *No Child Left Behind*.

Each month, *Education News Parents Can Use* showcases: schools and school districts from across the country; conversations with school officials, parents and education experts; and advice and free resources for parents and educators.

To learn about viewing options, including webcasts, visit <http://www.ed.gov> and click on “Parents,” then “News Parents Can Use”; or call toll-free 1-800-USA-LEARN.

## Finding What Works in Education

The current nationwide emphasis on ensuring that all students and schools meet high standards has increased the demand for evidence of what works in education. The What Works Clearinghouse, established in 2002 by the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences, provides educators, policymakers, researchers and the public with a central and trusted source of scientific evidence to help them make informed decisions about student achievement.

Available online at

<http://www.whatworks.ed.gov>, the What Works Clearinghouse offers a set of easily accessible databases and user-friendly reports that provide education consumers with high-quality reviews of the effectiveness of education interventions (programs, products, practices and policies) intended to improve student outcomes. The reports, which are developed by a group of leading experts according to standards for reviewing and synthesizing research, point out when an intervention brings about the changes desired in student learning or behavior. Also included under a new rating system is an "improvement index" that quantifies the intervention's impact.

Most recently, the What Works Clearinghouse released reports on early and middle school math, reading, and preschool curricula and practices. Other studies examined include character education programs, dropout prevention strategies, and English language learner interventions. All reports are compiled from a synopsis of the most reliable, valid study findings.



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